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Understanding Seychelles students' social, academic and cultural experiences during transition to university

Sophia A. Harryba
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Understanding Seychelles Students' Social, Academic and Cultural Experiences during
Transition to University

Sophia A. Harryba

A report submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of
Arts (Psychology) Honors, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science,

Edith Cowan University

Submitted (October, 2008)

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- (ii) material from published sources used without proper acknowledgement; or
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A report submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor
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Submitted (August, 2008)

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Signature:

Date: 22nd August, 2008

Abstract

University transition is a form of change from the familiar to unfamiliar (Hellsten, 2002). According to a literature review, international students (IS) go through both positive and negative experiences due to cross- cultural learning (Grey, 2002). Findings from previous research can be broadly categorised into academic and/or socio- cultural difficulties. Academic issues included getting used to a different learning and teaching environment, a heavier study load coupled with language barriers and academic procedures (McInnis, 2001). Socio- cultural issues included culture shock (Townsend & Wan, 2007), language difficulties (Cannon, 2002), discrimination (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007) and financial issues (Forbes- Mewett et al., 2007). Although not mutually exclusive, many studies have studied either one or the other, ignoring the complex interaction between the two, but often international students experience an interaction of issues which can be inseparable (Yanhong & Kaye, 1998). To lessen negative transition, universities have provided a number of formal services, but due to the limitations of space, only the evaluated and reported services are discussed. As research has shown, most IS prefer informal and personalised services, making it harder for universities to cater for their individual needs (Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2007). Cost effectiveness in terms of manpower and infrastructure (Houston, 2008) and quality and inclusive education (Hellsten & Prescott, 2002) are issues related to service provision that was addressed. Limitations and direction for future research, in terms of more research focusing on the interaction of transition issues were discussed (Best, Hajzler, & Henderson, 2007).

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Date of Submission: 22th August, 2008

Understanding Seychelles Students' Social, Academic and Cultural Experiences during Transition to University

Transition is a form of change from the familiar to unfamiliar (Hellsten, 2002). Studies in university measure successful transition by academic success, completion of studies, or meeting the required standards for particular degrees (Evans, 2000), but measuring transition in this way only account for the student's academic life, ignoring the social and cultural aspects of the transition (McInnis et al., 2000). Research needs to understand university transition holistically (McInnis et al., 2000; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001; Singh & Thuraisingam, 2007). The current literature review will include studies that measure multiple aspects of university transition to allow for a better understanding of this complex issue.

Due to the effects of globalisation and internationalisation (Davies, Evans, & Reid, 2005; Hatoss, 2006) and following the decision by the Australian Department of Trade in 1985 to allow Australian tertiary institutions to offer places to full fee paying international students, the number of international students entering Australia for tertiary studies has continued to increase (Megarritty, 2007; Phillips, 1990). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007), Australia was the fifth largest destination for international students in 2004 and 2005, during which time 375,000 students entering Australia to study at a higher education institution. This figure is more than ten times the number of students entering in 1985, which was 30,000 (Marginson, 2007). As full fee paying international students (IS) are seen as a competitive export industry, and as Australia is only one of the English speaking western countries which offer tertiary education to international students, it has become important for countries to compete for

students and the funds they bring (Hatoss, 2006).

There are various reasons why international students choose to study abroad, including gaining cultural experience, improving their English language skills and in certain cases, to gain permanent residency in the host country (Birell, 2006). In a study carried out by Church (1982), international students reported that cross cultural learning not only increased their appreciation for their home country but it also gave them a broader perspective of the world, reduced ethnocentrism, intolerances and stereotypes and increased personal awareness, self- esteem and confidence.

Benefits of cross cultural learning occur on a personal and university level (Sam, 2001). Studies have reported that international students bring cultural mixture among the students in universities (Sam, 2001; Volet & Ang, 1998). According to Hellsten and Prescott (2002), international students are viewed as an essential part of the university, as they bring diversity. According to a report from the University of South Australia, international students “enriches the quality of the intellectual and social life of the university” (Liddicoat, 2004, p.2). Moreover, there is the idea that international students can act as cultural carriers, resources and links between cultures, which can lead to decreased hostility and discrimination and prejudice amongst cultures (Sam, 2001).

Apart from these cultural benefits of cross cultural learning, it has been argued that the first and foremost reason why tertiary institutions and host countries welcome international students lies in the economic benefits brought, both for the host country and education provider (Burns, 1991). Education services were the third highest export for Australia in 2004-05, and generated more than \$9 billion for the Australian economy (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Also, because full fee paying international

students pay their fees directly to the universities, the Australian government does not control the expenditure therein providing significant funds to universities (Wang & Shan, 2007). International students also help universities reach their minimum intake for the year, with more than 375,000 students entering higher education and thus helping the economic and financial standing of the institutions (Wang & Shan, 2007).

Because of the positive benefits brought by international students to both the host country and the university, some researchers have argued that it is the host country's moral obligation to fully understand this cohort of students, not only to help them transition smoothly, but as a means to protect and enhance the international students' commitment to the host country (McLaughlin, 1995). It has also been argued that accepting the monetary value of full fee paying international students should equate to quality service (McLaughlin, 1995; Novera, 2004). Not doing so has been described as exploitation on both the host country's part and the universities (McLaughlin, 1995; Novera, 2004). It has become important to understand the experiences they go through as they move to a new and sometimes different cultural and academic experience (McLaughlin, 1995).

Moreover, word of mouth is very influential and so if the students do not enjoy their experiences at the institution, they will not recommend the host country or the university to other prospective students (Hellsten, 2002). One of the many ways that can help prospective students to choose Australia as their country of preference for tertiary education is from positive feedback from past students and knowing that the university is a provider of quality education and catering to individual needs (Grey, 2002).

Universities need to better understand the experiences that international students go

through so better services offered to them reduce the negative issues with expectations not matching realities and any effects on the reputation of the host university (Grey, 2002). Also, prior research has shown that international students face many challenges during transition to university, which impacted their academic performance and psychological wellbeing, which then affected the academic institutions' reputation (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Thus, understanding the transition issues faced by international students will positively benefit the students, universities and the host countries (Hatoss, 2006; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Yanhong & Kaye, 1998).

The aim of the current paper is therefore to review the literature to date on university transition as experienced by IS and on the services provided by the universities to help international students cope with the transition to university. Finally, there will be a discussion on the discrepancy between what is being provided by the universities and what more can be done as indicated by previous research. The paper will conclude with a summary of the main points and directions for future research will be discussed.

Literature review on transition to university

An overview of the research has shown that there are two broad categories for transition, namely socio-cultural (Cannon, 2002; Grey, 2002; Townsend & Wan, 2007) and academic issues (McInnis, 2001; Ramsey, Barker, & Jones, 1999; Yanhong & Kaye, 1998). Although discussed separately, it has to be noted that both academic and socio cultural issues interact with and influence each other in a complex way to explain international students' holistic experience during transition to university (Yanhong & Kaye, 1998). Each will be discussed below, followed by a discussion of their interaction and how that affects transition.

1. Academic adjustment

Academic stress is experienced by almost all students who are in their first year at university (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005). Commonly referred to as the 'first year experience', it is characterised by confusion and stress related to the change in learning environment and methods, as many of the local students is school leavers (Transition Program, 2002). As such, these students were used to a more dependent and formal relationship with their teachers and adapting to the informal and independent learning and teaching style can become stressful and frustrating (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005). Studies have shown that both domestic and international students face academic problems such as higher work and study load (Transition Program, 2002), financial problems, poor health, loneliness, interpersonal conflicts and problems with developing personal autonomy (Baker & Siryk, 1986; Erikson, 1963; Glover, 2000; Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1978).

In a report that surveyed the changes in the attitudes and experiences of first year students over a ten year period, it was found that all students experience stress related to study load, independent learning and unit content (Dalziel & Peat, 1997; Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005). On the other hand, these experiences were intensified for many international students as they were facing different teaching and learning styles, possible language barriers and adapting to a new culture (Dalziel & Peat, 1997; Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005). Therefore, transitioning to university affects all students, but affects IS more than younger local students (Dalziel & Peat, 1997).

Apart from the stress associated with starting the first year of university, other studies carried out on transitioning to university have found that international students

also experience adjustment difficulties due to the difference in learning and teaching methods (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Kiley, 2003; Lewthwaite, 1996; Major, 2005; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Stoyloff, 1997; Zhang, 2002).

This was demonstrated in a study done by Samuelowicz (1987). It was one of the first studies to shed light on international students' experience due to the difference in learning and teaching styles and it was found that international students' learning style affected their academic outcome. Teaching staff felt international students over relied on them, that they did not use effective study methods, relied on rote memorization instead of understanding and critique, and expected lecturers and tutors to provide 'correct' answers and were unwilling to participate in the interactive style of learning. These findings have been replicated (Burch, 2008).

Furthermore, Hellsten (2002) interviewed students from China and Korea who explained that they were used to passive learning, and that discussion and arguments with their teacher was seen as rude. They also pointed out that their classrooms were very formal, whereby they were meant to address the teacher by a title such as "miss" or "sir". Adjusting to the informal environment which required critical thinking was very difficult for these students (Hellsten, 2002).

Other academic problems experienced by IS include difficulty following academic rules, which leads to plagiarism (Campbell- Evans & Leggett, 2007; Darab, 2006; Green, Williams, & Kessel, 2006; Walker, 1998), and difficulty using resources to enhance their learning (Huang, 2006; McClure, 2005). Plagiarism has been identified as one of the major issues faced by universities both from local and international students, where students fail to acknowledge other authors' work (Campbell- Evans & Leggett,

2007). Although universities have developed a number of services to help reduce this problem, including educating the staff and students, consistent penalties for continued offences and programs for students whose first language is not English, the incidence of plagiarism continues to be a problem (Walker, 1998). It has been concluded that in order to help international students with academic problems and to increase quality in transnational education, constant investment in relations at all levels, including the students, host and partner universities and staff is needed (Campbell- Evans & Leggett, 2007).

Apart from plagiarising, IS also lacked the confidence and skills to write a western-style research project (Durkin, 2005; Holmes, 2005). In this case study, the 41 Chinese students reported problems with referencing, meeting requirements for essays and developing critical arguments. Therefore, programs developed by universities should take these issues into consideration.

Another area of research into academic difficulties faced by IS has focused on the supervisory relationships in higher degree research (Wang & Shan, 2007). Many of these students came straight from undergraduate studies where they were independent learners and since the supervisory relationship requires a level of communication and partnership, many international students found it difficult to adjust to this type of learning (McClure, 2005; Trice, 2003; Trice, 2005; Zhao & Han, 2007). In a study carried out by Agyirey-Kwakye and Abaidoo (1995) 12% of surveyed international graduate students rated their supervisory relationship as 'bad' or 'very bad'. Many other studies have reported the same results, meaning that international students in higher degree research not only have higher academic duties to adjust to, but they also have to get used to a sometimes difficult

supervisory relationship (Blunt & Li, 1998; Chiste, 1997; Selvadurai, 1991)

Research has shown that the supervisory relationship is further complicated by the different expectations set by the faculties (Adrian- Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007; Guilfoyle, 2006; Major 2005). In their study, Adrian- Taylor, Noels, and Tischler (2007) studied 55 international graduate students and 53 faculty supervisors and it was found that 22% of students and 34% of supervisors indicated that they had experienced conflict which arose from lack of openness, time and feedback, unclear expectations and lack of English language skills (Adrian- Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007). It was reported that the students expected more direction from their supervisors and the supervisors expected independent study from the students. It was concluded that conflict management for all students and supervisors should be compulsory and open discussion about each party's roles and responsibilities should be done before supervision starts to reduce the likelihood of conflict.

In another study, Zhao and Han (2007) carried out a study which showed that Chinese IS in higher degree research experienced problems adjusting to the new academic culture and writing style. It was pointed out that there are considerable differences in structuring fictional texts in English and Chinese (Huang, 2006). Chinese language is implicit and ambiguous, whereas English is very explicit, making comprehension difficult for the supervisors reading a direct translation from Chinese language to English (Adrian- Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007). It was concluded that international students face many academic problems, in terms of writing, translating and working in a supervisory relationship. Coaching and open discussion were proposed solution which could reduce these academic problems faced by international students.

As can be seen, many studies have shown that international students face a number of academic issues at all levels of tertiary education. The review will now discuss socio-cultural issues as outlined by research on university transition.

2. Socio- cultural issues

Baker (1999) described socio- cultural adjustment as “culture- specific skills, the ability to negotiate the host culture and general behavioural competence” (Baker, 1999, p.6). Both qualitative and quantitative studies have identified the following socio-cultural issues that international students face during their transition to university: language barriers (Searl & Ward, 1990; Wang & Shan, 2007; Zhang, 2002), disparity between cultural values and norms or ‘culture shock’ (Delaney, 2002; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Talbot et al., 1999), distress with the new physical environment (Searl & Ward, 1990), difficulty in forming and maintaining friendships and relationships from the host country (Wang & Shan, 2007), low or no participation in social activities and/ or leisure activities (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005), discrimination and stereotyping (Talbot et al., 1999), lack of social support (Burns, 1991; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005), accommodation difficulties (Lin & Yi, 1997; Suen, 1998), dietary restrictions (Lin & Yi, 1997), problems with immigration (Mori, 2000; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Wan, 2001) and financial stress (Burns, 1991; Forbes- Mewett et al., 2007).

Transition is a complex issue and often the range of socio cultural problems experienced by international students cannot be separated. To achieve a full understanding of how international students cope and what services we can develop to support their coping, we cannot take any particular dimensions of experience in isolation from others. For many international students it is the combination of experiences on

several levels which makes their transition and ability to cope overwhelming (Guilfoyle, 2006). Thus, the review will now discuss research which integrates both academic and socio- cultural issues, to show how they interact to shape the experiences of international students.

3. Integrating academic and socio- cultural issues

3.1 Language barrier

Much research has shown that language barriers affect the academic lives of international students, but it also affects their social lives (Holmes, 2005). Both academics and students have identified that language proficiency or lack thereof, is one of their main concerns (Borland & Pearce 1999; Burns, 1991; Phillips 1990; Samuelowicz, 1987). In Samuelowicz's study (1987), 52% of international students and staff surveyed reported that language problems were an "important" or "very important" problem for them.

A similar study done by Burns (1991) showed that 50% of international students reported that their English language skills were "poor" or "very poor" and they ranked their writing skills as the lowest of the four macro skills, followed by listening, speaking and reading (Burns, 1991). Burns (1991) argues that not only do the students need to develop their speaking skills, but since a number of these students learned British or American English, there lies the task to understand the Australian dialect, including different vocabularies, idiomatic expressions and a different accent.

In studies with higher degree research (HDR) international students, Holmes (2005) and Durkin (2005) found that international students were reluctant to participate in oral presentations and research seminars due to perceived language difficulties. Many of the

HDR international students reported that they feared a lack of understanding due to their accent or inability to speak “proper” English. Guilfoyle (2006) reported that HDR international students can feel isolated and lonely when language barriers hindered the formation of relationships both in and outside of the academic realm.

In a more recent quantitative study done by Dao, Lee, and Chang (2007), 112 graduate Taiwanese students were recruited to examine the relationship between acculturation, perceived English fluency, social support and depression. To measure the participant’s perception of their English fluency, the self reported fluency of English scale was used, which consisted of three questions. Three other scales were used, namely the social support questionnaire short form, Suinn Lew Asian self identity acculturation scale and the centre for epidemiologic studies depression scales. Acculturation in this study referred to the degree that the students adopted the American culture. Results indicated that students who adopted the American culture had better English skills and those who had higher social support experienced less acculturative stress. Also, females tended to be more depressed and had lower perceived English fluency. It was thus concluded that language fluency affected the amount of social support received by students and this ultimately determined the amount of acculturative stress experienced. Related results have also been reported by numerous other studies, where acculturative stress was found to be related to perceived language barriers and amount of social support available (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al- Timimi, 2004; Shih & Brown, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

In another longitudinal study, Ying (2003) studied 155 Taiwanese graduate IS in the United States to examine academic performance and overall experience, which showed

that IS were amongst the highest achievers at the university, with their GPA lying between A's and B's. The students rated the quality of their overall experience as either neutral or well, and ranked their English skills at the midpoint for all measured factors. On average, the students experienced more loneliness because they were unable to make American friends, due to their language inabilities. This was also reflected in their low social network scores. Further, it was also found that isolation led to depressive states and a poorer quality of overall experience and these coincided with poorer English language skills and lower social networks. As can be seen, language barriers affected not only the student's social network, but their overall university experience as well (Ying, 2003).

In yet another study carried out by Major (2005), language barrier was identified as the major problem that affected successful adjustment to university life for ten Asian students attending a U.S. university. Three main themes emerged in relation to successful adjustment, which was defined as intrapersonal, socio cultural and academic. The participants explained that they experienced socio cultural and interpersonal challenges solely based on linguistic barriers. The participants argued that they were placed on probation because they were failing some of their units and some of them considered dropping out because their academic writing did not meet the expectations of the lecturers. Also, many reported that because of their limited English skills, it was difficult for them to make friends. It was argued that because many international students face a complex mixture of issues, services should be put in place to reflect this complexity (Major, 2005).

The issues surrounding language barriers is not one sided, as many researchers and teaching staff blame this problem on the low university entry requirements and/or

leniency by the immigration offices (Birell, 2006). To be eligible for higher education in Australia, a certain level of English proficiency must be met (Birell, 2006). Often, this includes a band 6 or above in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which tests writing, listening, reading and speaking skills (Birell, 2006). Coley (1999) has noted that there is at least 61 ways used to measure English language proficiency for entrance into Australian universities, and because of the idea of the stringency of these English tests, many staff and faculty members assume that international students should have a certain level of English proficiency to enter university and so should not blame their lack of English skills for their academic problems (Dunn & Wallace, 2006).

Research has shown that there are loop holes in the system, whereby many international students are admitted in universities with a low or no English language skills (Birell, 2006). This causes a number of problems, both for the student, who assumes that their language skill is adequate seeing that they have been accepted into university, and for the teaching staff because they assume that the students have the level of English required for university levels of teaching. Both parties are then disappointed when the student does not perform up to standards. Phillips (1990) and McGowan and Potter (2006) have argued that it then becomes a problem for the teaching staff because they either have to lower the level of teaching to suit the students' needs or ignore the problem entirely. Ultimately, this can lead to frustration and can affect the universities' standards and reputation (Phillips, 1990)

Another social problem linked to English skills is the stereotype held by some faculty members and staff (Biggs, 1997). As pointed out by Ballard (1987, p.115) "It is well

established that if overseas students have any problems with their studies both they and their teachers will automatically assume the fault lies with their inadequate control of English". Many studies have found that some staff and faculty members' automatically assumed that international students lacked English language skills and so their academic work reflected this stereotype. The students were failed or attained bad marks because the staff had preconceived ideas about their lack of English language skills instead of looking at the actual teaching methods used. Therefore, the student was viewed as the problem instead of having the education provider taking some responsibility regarding their staff's attitudes towards IS (Biggs, 1997). This may be a reason why English proficiency is listed as the primary reason why international students do not adjust successfully (Holmes, 2005).

It is clear from the above review that language barriers pose complex problems for many international students and teachers; affecting their academic lives and their personal and social life as well.

3.2 *Culture shock*

Another aspect of cross cultural learning that interacts with academic and other socio- cultural issues is what is commonly referred to as culture shock (Han, Jamieson, & Young, 2000). The term 'culture shock' was first used by Oberg (1960), who identified six characteristics underlying culture shock, namely strain or stress relating to psychological adaptation; a sense of loss or deprivation resulting from the removal of friends, status, role, and personal possessions; fear of rejection by, or rejection of, the new culture; confusion in role definition; unexpected anxiety, disgust or indignation regarding cultural differences; and feelings of helplessness, including confusion,

frustration and depression.

Generally, research done with international students has found that culture shock affects females and younger students more than males and older students (Han, Jamieson, & Young, 2000; Kazantzis & Flett, 1998; Stroebe et al., 2002). This finding has been contradicted though, with studies reporting that younger people are not more susceptible to homesickness and culture shock, but that a particular group and age is more likely to experience shock than others (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Eureling-Bontekoe, Brouwers, & Verschuur, 2000).

Also, research has found that cultural background determines the extent of culture shock experienced by students (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). It has been argued that an individual whose culture is very different to that of the host culture is also more susceptible to experiencing culture shock (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Studies have shown that when international students from collectivist cultures, such as from Asian countries, come to study in individualistic and westernised cultures these students experienced more culture shock as the two cultures were very different (Pines et al., 2003; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). On the contrary, students who come from the United Kingdom and decide to study in the United States found it less difficult to adjust culturally since the cultures of the two countries are similar (Feldman & Thompson, 1993; Mortenson, 2006; Parker & McEvoy, 1993; Ying, 2003). In a study carried out by Yanhong and Kaye (1998), 155 international students at a university in the UK were surveyed. Of those, 45.8% were of Asian descent and 54.2% were from Western Europe. Significant differences were found between Asian and Western European students, whereby the former had more difficulties to adjust to a western culture, whose values and

beliefs were different to those of their original culture.

In a study carried out by Andrade (2006), 20 IS from different countries were interviewed to understand their adjustment process. Maximum variation was used as the sampling strategy, and emailed invitations were sent to 95 IS (Creswell, 2003; Glesne, 1999; Krueger & Casey, 2000). Three methods were used to analyse the data whereby potential ideas were noted and member checked. The recorded interviews were the transcribed and common themes were extracted using thematic analysis. Results indicated that many students had problems finding part-time jobs and were experiencing financial difficulties. Students reported that they experienced difficulty with time-management, trying to balance their academic and social lives. Also, the students reported experiencing difficulties adjusting to the new teaching styles as they were used to the passive teaching style, which is very different to the more independent and active style of American universities. Many of the students also reported language problems, issues with cultural differences and problems with social support in terms of having American friends. This study is a good example of how complicated university transition can become as the students were facing a number of interacting issues (Andrade, 2006).

Another study that illustrates how culture shock adds to the complexity of university transition was carried out by Singh and Thuraisingam (2007). They interviewed 22 international students studying at a Malaysian university, who came from four countries, namely Nigeria, Korea, India and Indonesia. A phenomenological approach was used, whereby the subjective, lived academic and socio cultural experiences were captured (Manen, 1997; Richards, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Five main clusters emerged as results, including of strangeness, expectations and

disillusionment, which surrounded the difficulties of being in a different culture; of divides and bonds, which focused on language issues; of perception, prejudice and culture, which was based on experiences of discrimination. The other two clusters were of challenges and achievements, which were based on the academic culture; and finally; of social support and neglect, whereby the international students expressed that they did not have any Malaysian friends, and lacked the social support they needed to adjust to the Malaysian lifestyle.

In another qualitative study, Wang and Shan (2007) interviewed 10 Chinese IS who were studying in Australian universities to explore their learning experiences, challenges and coping strategies. Using a phenomenological approach, face- to- face interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. As the interviews were carried out in Mandarin, the transcripts were also translated from Chinese to English. The findings indicated that socio- cultural adjustments included problems with making friends, being alone and isolated and engaging in social activities. Many of the students pointed out that it was difficult to form friends with Australians because of their limited language skills. Also, many pointed out that they would enjoy the social support, as they were experiencing difficulty to adjust because of the culture shock. Academic adjustment included issues surrounding learning shock, including difficulties adjusting with the teaching and learning style, managing and using learning resources and adjusting to academic conventions. As the students came from China where the learning process is passive and dependent upon the teacher, many students expressed issues with the independent and active learning environment in Australian universities. Findings were consistent with previous literature and it was pointed out that universities should try to

bridge the cultural divide by working with international students to identify needed services (Wang & Shan, 2007).

Apart from the students' cultural background, there have been numerous studies done on university transition that has found that culture shock can cause a number of mental problems on top of academic and social problems (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). In a study done by Suen (1998) who used semi structured interviews with fifteen matured aged Hong-Kong students attending an Australian university reported that, as many of the interviewed students did not have relatives or friends studying in Australia, they experienced feelings of loneliness, depression and helplessness during their first few months at university. Moreover, the students reported that they experienced problems finding accommodation. Most of the students had not visited Australia before and had financial issues as well, so finding cheap accommodation on their own was difficult. The other problem that was reported was difficulty adapting to the Australian culture and language. As their mother tongue was Cantonese, many students reported experiencing misunderstandings with other people due to their language issues. This lead to a withdrawal from forming friendships and only few of the students had an Australian friend, whereas the majority had friends from Hong Kong. Therefore, these students were trapped in a vicious circle which was detrimental to both their physical and mental health.

3.3 Discrimination

Another issue that contributes to the complexity of university transition is discrimination (Romero & Roberts, 2003). Discrimination is another facet of culture shock and many studies have shown that international students face racial and/or ethnic discrimination when studying abroad and this can lead to a number of negative effects in

relation to their identity, including lower self esteem, (Phinney, Madden, & Santos, 1998; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003) high stress levels, (Pak, Dion, & Dion, 1991) higher levels of anxiety and depression, (Phinney, Madden, & Santos, 1998) chronic mental health problems (Leong & Ward, 2000) and higher levels of in group identification (Pak, Dion, & Dion, 1991).

In a recent study, Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) found a significant difference between levels of homesickness and discrimination in international and local American students. The IS reported feeling lonely, sad and depressed because of a lack of social support and being far from familiarity. Moreover, they reported experiencing racial and ethnic discrimination, which was more common amongst non white students. These findings have also been replicated across studies (Biasco, Goodwin, & Vitale, 2001; Constantine, Kindaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, & Baden, 2005; D'Augelli & Hersberger, 1993; Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002; Hurtado, 1992; Katz & Braly, 1933; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Stroebe, van Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis, 2002).

In other studies done on ethnocentrism in the United States, it was found that although 'international students' are a diverse group of people, their American peers, faculty, administrators and the general community viewed them as homogeneous (Leong & Chou, 1996; Mestenhauser, 1983; Paige, 1990; Pedersen, 1991; Spradley & Phillips, 1972). The IS were viewed as handicapped or lacking language and other academic capabilities (Paige, 1990). The students were seen as 'pathetic' and many peers reported that international students suffer from psychological, social and cultural adjustment issues (Spencer- Rodgers, 2001). Literature review done on stereotypes and ethnocentrism regarding international students have been numerous, but it has been noted

that it is very difficult to define and measure stereotypical beliefs (Biernat & Crandall, 1994; Brigham, 1971; Esses et al., 1993; Hamilton & Sherman, 1994; Stangor & Lange, 1994).

In Spencer- Rodgers' (2001) study, a free response method was used whereby students reported the first word that came to mind when thinking about IS. It was found that American peers saw international students as 'foreign', 'socially and culturally maladjusted' 'weird' 'clueless' amongst other negative connotations. It was concluded that because it is almost impossible to explore the full range of stereotypical beliefs amongst all students, more research is needed (Spencer- Rodgers, 2001). Having said that, many of the studies that have been carried out have suggested that discrimination leads not only to social isolation, but can affect the student's academic life and their mental and physical health (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Stroebe, van Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis, 2002). Coupled with all the other issues discussed, including language barriers and culture shock, discrimination can cripple a student in all aspects of their life and at worst can lead to suicide (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

3.4 Financial issues

Another common issue faced by international students is financial problems (Forbes-Mewett et al., 2007). International students are often referred to as sojourners, that is, individuals who temporarily live in another country (Adler, 1975; Atherton, 2003; Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Brein & David, 1971; Church, 1982; Coates, 2004; Davey, 2005; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Hechanova- Alampay et al., 2002; Sam, 2001; Swagler & Jome, 2005; Tokoyawa & Tokoyawa, 2002; Townsend & Wan, 2007). As such, they are often on temporary visas and also because they are full- fee paying students, the options

available to them to access financial help is limited (Mori, 2000). Financial worries can affect a student's academic life because the student might not be able to pay their university fees (Dorough, 2006). Also, financial worries can preoccupy a student's life, leaving no room for social interactions or for studying (Dorough, 2006). Many studies have therefore argued that more options should be available to help international students secure jobs and get financial aid (Dorough, 2006).

In a qualitative study carried out by Forbes- Mewett et al. (2007), 200 international students were interviewed across Australian universities. The students drew on multiple sources of income, whereby 61% were being sponsored by their families, 34.5% were on government- funded scholarships and 32.5% were working. Many of the interviewed students reported feeling guilty for the financial burden placed on their families and the continued pressure to excel academically to make their families proud. When asked if they were experiencing financial difficulties, 37% of students replied that they experienced acute financial stress, resulting from inability to gain paid work, having dependents, living costs and unavailability of help from universities. It was noted that older students experienced more financial stress because they were unlikely to be sponsored by their families. The study concluded that since international students bring economic benefits to the host country, both the host country and the university should offer financial assistance to them, as is offered to domestic students. Many other studies have shown that international students experience financial stress during their studies (Dorough, 2006; Dunn, 2006; Leonard, Pelletier, & Morley, 2003; Mori, 2000; Wang, 2004).

Having discussed the issues surrounding university transition, the review will now

focus on the reported services provided by universities which aim to help international students adjust successfully to the university life (Grey, 2002).

Services that help international students cope

Understanding the coping strategies used by IS during university transition can help universities and host countries develop better catered services which foster resilience (Benard, 1996; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Grey, 2002; Muldoon, 2003; Resnick et al., 1997). Thus, if universities knew the coping strategies that IS used, these could be incorporated into services to better serve IS and lessen transition issues (Grey, 2002). To date, universities provide a number of formal and informal services for international students, but due to the limitations of this paper, only those that have been reported and evaluated will be discussed below.

1. Orientation and pre information services

One of the common ways in which universities help to promote resilience in international students, is by offering pre arrival information packs through formal or informal communication between faculty members and prospective students (Yucas, 2003), study abroad programs (Chalou & Steglitz, 2003; Holland & Kedia, 2003), post arrival information (Berg, 2003; Kelm, 2003) and orientation programs (Suen, 1998). These programs and services can help to lessen their confusion and feelings of being lost, by preparing international students for university lives overseas (Suen, 1998). Apart from helping the student get acquainted with the academic system, the programs and services can also teach the students about the points of contact should help be needed (Suen, 1998). Many researchers have argued that international students often cannot afford to attend orientation programs and so universities should cater for these students by offering

a person whom the international students can contact about orientation information (Rhoden & Boin, 2002). Also, many universities do not provide pre arrival information or have study abroad programs as they are seen as expensive, and so many international students do not benefit from these services (Rhoden & Boin, 2002).

2. Peer mentoring services

Another service provided by universities that has proven to help international students cope is the use of peer mentoring programs (Best, Hajzler, & Henderson, 2007). According to Astin (1997), the most powerful effect on cognitive and affective development is the student's peer group. Peer mentoring can directly or indirectly promote social connectedness and adjustment (Olivas & Li, 2006). Peer mentoring can lessen isolation and psychological problems such as depression as it strengthens student's engagement with their course (Austin, Covalea, & Weal, 2002). It also brings the students closer to each other and the university (Jones, Robertson, & Line, 1999). Apart from acting as an academic medium, peer mentoring can also be a social medium as well (Barker, 2002; Leask, 1999).

3. Social support services

Apart from peer mentoring, universities also provide other social activities organised by the international offices on campus, to help lessen social isolation (Muldoon, 2003). Research has shown that students who engage in social activities and who have local friends suffer less from social isolation and other mental illnesses (Olivas & Li, 2006). Research has also shown that by getting the students involved in active participation and engaging international students in either classroom, online and/or social activities can lessen both academic pressures and also lessen psychological problems

(Best, Hajzler, & Henderson, 2007; Carr, Koyama, Thiagarajan, 2003; Daroesman, Looi, & Butler, 2005; James & Devlin, 2001; Li & Gasser, 2005; Muldoon, 2003; Olivas & Li, 2006). Mohr (1994) has argued that engaging international students in an informal environment facilitate a more productive working relationship and that this relationship can then enable the teacher to approach the students on academic subjects more easily. But as said before, getting international students engaged in activities can be complicated by linguistic and/or cultural barriers (Krause et al., 2005).

Other services provided by universities to lessen students' social isolation is by offering free computing facilities which makes it easier for students to keep in contact with the university, friends and also their families. A study done by Myburgh, Niehaus, and Poggenpoel (2002), who interviewed PhD international students about their coping strategies, found that there was heavy reliance on technology, mainly telephone and emails to keep in contact with friends and family back in their country of origin.

Although research has shown that social support is an important coping strategy, many studies have also shown that not all IS access services provided by universities (Pines, Zaidman, Wang, Chenbing & Ping, 2003). A study by Pines et al., (2003), found that Israeli students were more comfortable and confident about accessing services than Chinese students. The authors concluded that universities should be sensitive to the types of services that are offered to international students cohorts, since each cohort has their personal views on when and how to access these services (Pines et al., 2003).

Further, in the above study by Hechanova- Alampay et al. (2002) found that IS used student services and formal counseling less than the domestic students. This study, and many others has supported the fact that universities need to be cultural sensitive to the

influence of cultural background on the type and amount of social support needed by international students (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Heiman, 2004; Mortenson, 2006; Sinha, Willson, & Watson, 2000; Surdam & Collins, 1984).

4. Academic services

Other more formal services provided by universities to help international students cope has been in the form of academic or learning programs such as the Curtin University pathfinder (Dawson & Conti- Bekkers, 2002). This program included a six week cultural/ study skills transition program offered at the Curtin University learning support centre. It targeted the two most common problems experienced by international students: academic and culture adjustment problems. Students were encouraged to participate in small groups where open discussion was initiated and experiences exchanged. Although more research is needed to assess the effectiveness of the pathfinder, it has been identified as a good initiative to help international students cope with transition to university (Dawson & Conti- Bekkers, 2002). Other such programs are available both through universities, such as the Chinese Mentor Guide Program, (Best, Hajzler, & Henderson, 2007; Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2007) the Transition workshop (Dalziel & Peat, 1997) and the Learning support Unit (LSU) at the Monash college (Chung, Kelliher, & Smith, 2005) and also from the host country in the form of language classes or foundation/ bridging classes which aims to help international students cope with cross- cultural learning (Hatoss, 2006; Ransom, Larcombe, & Baik, 2005).

Reviews of the above programs have shown that it does help students in a number of academic areas (Chung, Kelliher, & Smith, 2005). For instance, in the LSU program mentioned above, it was found that 45% of students benefited from essay structuring and

report writing, referencing (22.5%) presentation skills (21%), exam preparation (18.8%), learning and study skills (17.5%) and language skills (11.5%). The review concluded by adding that although this program is expensive both in monetary and staffing terms, it is clearly essential to the international students as it helped them learn effective skills used at university and lessens the academic burden (Chung, Kelliher, & Smith, 2005).

5. Internationalizing the curriculum

Finally, research has shown that staff and faculty members can help international students cope with transition to university by being more understanding and culture-sensitive (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Many universities which offer off-shore learning opportunities have made attempts in internationalizing their curriculums, but there is still much debate on what this means and how it will be done (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Moreover, faculty and staff members have expressed their frustration at the system for enrolling students who have English language issues and their concern surrounding culture sensitivity (Phillips, 1990).

Trans-national teaching and internationalizing the curriculum is a complicated issue and it has been argued that universities should try to strive for inclusive universities whereby instead of the international students adjusting to the university, the university would be able to cater for all individuals without losing quality teaching (Hellsten & Prescott, 2002).

Conclusion

University transition is a complex issue, but since IS bring economic and reported cultural benefits to the universities and host countries and as international education is a competitive business, it was pointed out that institutions should seek to understand the

issues associated with cross- cultural learning so to provide better services to cater for these students (Davies, Evans, & Reid, 2005). Research has shown that IS face a number of interacting academic and socio- cultural issues (McInnis, 2001). This is further complicated by the fact that different IS cohort experience different problems (Ying, 2003). Universities have provided a number of services to help international students cope with cross- cultural learning, but as discussed, many international students either miss out on some of the programs offered by the universities or are not comfortable due to their own cultural beliefs and values to access these formal services (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Moreover, research has shown that it is the more informal and personal services that international students seek (Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2007). This has prompted many to argue that it is impossible to meet each and every international student need, but research showed that although some services might be seen as costly to the universities, as full- fee paying students, international students deserve quality and inclusive education (Townsend & Wan, 2007). To understand the issue of university transition and to shed a more holistic view on the changes that international students go through in the duration of their course, future research is needed which unpacks the interaction between academic and socio- cultural issues (Ying, 2003). Also, as pointed out, there are numerous negative effects of cross- cultural learning, and so more cost effective services should be developed to cater for international students, which would ensure that inclusive education is being received as well as quality education for all students (Townsend & Wan, 2007).

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Understanding Seychelles Students' Social, Academic and Cultural Experiences during
Transition to University

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A report submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor
of Arts (Psychology) Honours, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science

Edith Cowan University

October, 2008

"I declare that this written assignment is my own work and does not include:

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Abstract

A phenomenological approach was used to explore the experiences of Seychelles international students (IS) during university transition. Rationale for the study was twofold; first, there has been little research done on this cohort and second there is a need to understand their experiences to demonstrate the ways that better catered services can be developed for unique cohorts. Twelve Seychelles students from Edith Cowan University, Perth, were interviewed. Interviews were done in Creole, the participants' native language, and the data was translated into English, transcribed and thematically analysed. Three themes were extracted, namely social, academic and financial support and it was reported that the broader overarching phenomenological 'essence' of the experience was a sense of isolation, which was experienced across various dimensions. It was concluded that Seychelles IS reported some similar transitional experiences described by previous research, but there were also unique experiences and the university services should reflect these. Limitations and direction for future research are discussed.

Researcher: Sophia Harryba
Supervisor: Andrew Guilfoyle
Date of Submission: 24th October, 2008

Understanding Seychelles Students' Social, Academic and Cultural Experiences during

Transition to University

Introduction

Transition is a form of change from the familiar to unfamiliar (Hellsten, 2002).

The effects of globalisation and internationalisation has lead to an increase in the number of international students (IS) enrolled in tertiary education worldwide (Hatoss, 2006). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007), Australia was the fifth largest destination for international students in 2004 and 2005, during which time 375,000 students entered Australia to study at a higher education institution. This figure is more than ten times the number of students entering in 1985, which was 30,000 (Marginson, 2007).

IS are contributing a number of economic, cultural and social benefits to both the host countries and universities (McInnis, 2001). Education services were the third highest export for Australia in 2004-05, and generated more than \$9 billion for the Australian economy (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). IS also help universities reach their minimum intake for the year, with more than 375,000 students entering higher education and thus helping the economic and financial standing of the institutions (Wang & Shan, 2007). As international education is a competitive export industry, it has become important for universities to understand IS experiences so to better cater for their needs (Yanhong & Kaye, 1998).

Research has shown that although some IS experience a smooth transition into university, most find it very stressful and difficult to adjust to the new culture, language and academic environment (Singh & Thuraisingam, 2007). A review of literature shows

that research has traditionally categorised university transition issues into either academic or socio- cultural, ignoring the complex interplay between these issues (Cannon, 2002).

Research has shown that both domestic and international students face academic problems such as higher work and study load (Transition Program, 2002), financial problems, poor health, loneliness, interpersonal conflicts and problems with developing personal autonomy (Glover, 2000). These issues are exacerbated for IS though, because they are often faced with additional language barriers, cultural differences and different teaching and learning styles (Dalziel & Peat, 1997).

Apart from the higher work and study load, research has shown that IS experience a number of academic problems during university transition (Major, 2005). These included difficulty following university rules, which in some cases lead to plagiarism (Campbell- Evans & Leggett, 2007), difficulty in using resources (Huang, 2006), and difficulty in adjusting to the informal, independent and interactive style of learning used in universities (Burch, 2008).

Research has also shown that IS face a number of socio cultural issues, including language barriers, culture disparity, difficulty socialising with host nationals, lack of social support and financial difficulties (Wan, 2001). Studies have shown that these socio cultural issues affected both the students' academic lives and social lives (Holmes, 2005). Holmes (2005) showed that transition is a complex issue and often the range of problems experienced by IS cannot be separated.

This is one of the limitations of previous literature that will be addressed in the

present study. For many IS, it is the interplay between social and academic issues that affect them most (Guilfoyle, 2006) and the present study aims to identify this interplay by exploring the interaction across university transition issues. A second limitation of previous research to be addressed in the present study concerns a general definition of 'IS' in the studied population. We need research on particular IS cohorts in order to best illustrate how services can meet IS needs, and so the current study aims to add to the knowledge on transition, by understanding in detail the interacting nature of issues surrounding university transition for one unique cohort.

The present study

The present study was qualitative in nature and aimed to understand the university transition experiences of Seychelles students. The research question is therefore what are the experiences of Seychelles students during their transition to university? Information from the current study will hopefully lead to better understanding on the unique experiences of Seychelles students as they transition to university, which can lead to innovative strategies and catered services for prospective students.

Methodology

Design

The study used a qualitative approach because it allows for a broader picture and allows the students themselves to describe their experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative studies not only provides in depth understanding of complex issues, but also provides space to include new information that the participants provide which the literature might not have yet discussed (Richards, 2005).

Within this framework, a phenomenological approach was used, allowing the

students to describe their subjective, lived experiences. Phenomenology is “the study of phenomena as they present themselves in direct experience” (O’Leary, 2004, pp. 122-123). In this study, transcendental phenomenology was used, which allowed the researcher to bracket their experiences and this was important as the researcher is also a Seychelles student (Manen, 1997). This method therefore allowed the researcher to understand the participant’s point of view without imposing their own opinions.

Participants

The participants were from the Seychelles, an archipelago of over 115 islands situated in the Indian Ocean, with an approximated population of 80000. The island nation is home to multiple cultures, with English and French as their second and third language.

For these students, critical context in the process for obtaining a scholarship is complicated and very difficult. To secure a scholarship, students and their guarantor, who are often their parents, need to sign a bond with the government, stating that after their studies, they would come back to the Seychelles and work for the government and that they would not fail any units. Failure to do so will lead to the cancellation of the scholarship and guarantors would have to pay the full cost of the studies completed.

Scholarships awarded by the Seychelles government are fully funded and include a monthly allowance which covers living expenses and health cover, and the university and tuition fees are paid directly to the universities from the ministry of education in the Seychelles. It has to be added that the decision as to the destination of study is made by the ministry of education and students play no part in this process. As will be seen, the scholarship poses further pressure on the students to excel academically, and it is one of

the reasons why the Seychelles cohort is unique and why they have been chosen to be studied.

The final sample of selected participants was twelve undergraduate Seychelles students who replied to the emails advertising the project. They were studying at the Edith Cowan University, Australia. Of those, nine were from the Education and Arts faculty, training to be secondary teachers in various subjects and three were from the Computer, Health and Science faculty. Their age ranged from 21 to 38 years old, with six males and six females.

The researcher

I am also a Seychelles student at Edith Cowan University and undertaking this research as part of the requirements for an Honours degree. Being from the Seychelles gave me insight into the experiences of other Seychelles IS, as well as access to information that many of the interviewees might not have provided if an outsider was interviewing them. Many students reported that they were comfortable to talk to me because they could speak in their native language and because they knew me. To bracket my views a reflective journal was kept, comprising of the notes and observations made during data collection and analysis (Appendix E).

Materials

To undertake an ethically sound procedure, an information letter (Appendix C), a consent form (Appendix D) and a counselling service brochure were used. An interview schedule (Appendix A) was also used to collect data and during the interview, a digital tape recorder, a notepad and a pen were used to ensure accuracy of the data collection. To further ensure accurate data collection, a reflective journal was also kept (Appendix E).

Ethics

Tape recordings were destroyed on transcription. All personal information pertaining to the identification of participants was changed due to confidentiality issues. Only the researcher and supervisor had access to this information. The tape records were also destroyed by erasing all the information on the tapes and chemically destroying the tapes. No other copies were made other than the original. Computer files containing transcripts were erased by re formatting the hard drive of the computer. These procedures were followed to ensure participant confidentiality and were in accordance with the ethics committee.

In relation to the participants' wellbeing, an information letter (Appendix C) and a consent form (Appendix D) which contained information about their ethical rights as participants were given and signed. There was also a brochure and contact details of free counselling services provided by the university, which were offered to the participants if needed.

Procedure

Emailed information letters (Appendix C) and consent forms (Appendix D) were sent to all Seychelles students in universities across Perth, through an informal organisation for Seychelles students. After the two week period, twelve participants had responded and arrangements were made as to suitable time and venues for the interviews. A copy of the sent emails is attached in Appendix B.

The interviews used semi structured questions which facilitated the student's description of their experiences during university transition. Using the interview method allowed participants to express their views in detail but also allowed the researcher to

control the process by directing the questions (O'Leary, 2004). Unlike the questionnaires and scales, semi structured interviews allowed the participants to describe their experiences in depth, which leads to a more holistic understanding of university transition.

The questions used were developed based on findings from previous literature, including Wang and Shan (2007), whilst at the same time allowing for new information to be added. Although the questions were based on previous findings to avoid pre categorising the issues as either academic or socio cultural and ignoring the complex interaction, the questions were formulated to be general in nature, focusing on the student's expectations of how university would be like, their experiences so far and their coping strategies. An example of this is "What were your experiences of support when you arrived in Australia?" which is both general, but informative.

The questions were also read in Creole, their mother tongue, but the participants were told to answer in whichever of the three languages, namely Creole, French or English, that they felt proficient. This was done so that the participants could relax and build trust and rapport with the researcher. Also, Creole allowed them to answer in as much detail as possible, giving the researcher the opportunity to understand all their issues. Giving them a choice of language meant that the participants could feel more comfortable in answering the questions, and not feeling as if the research was a test on their English abilities. As previous research has shown, many international students rated their English language skills as one of their major problems (Samuelowicz, 1987), so to eliminate this issue, the questions were asked in Creole.

All interviews took place at Edith Cowan University, at both the Joondalup and

Mount Lawley campuses as agreed by both the participants and researcher. Before each interview started, participants were thanked for their agreement to participate and briefed about the research. They were reminded of the aims of the research and their rights as participants, including their right to withdraw at any time, to ask questions and clarification, and the process of ensuring confidentiality was also discussed. The participants then signed a consent form (Appendix D), which stated that they were agreeing to participate and to the use of their recorded interviews. Participants were also reminded that the research is interested in their experiences as university students and that there were no correct answers.

Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, and the interviews were audio taped to allow for accuracy, as the researcher could go back and check the interviews. A notepad was also used to note down key points, allowing the researcher to keep notes on personal thoughts. These notes also provide an audit trail for future researchers to follow the procedure (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). These notes were then compiled to form a reflective journal (Appendix E) which also served as an audit trail and as a way to validate the researcher's thoughts and findings and as a way to bracket the researcher's own personal views. The notes included observations made during the interviews and data analysis, about participants' behaviours, interview content and the researcher's thoughts.

At the end of each interview, the participants were debriefed and prompted to ask further questions or comments which were addressed by the researcher. A pamphlet of counselling information was then handed out to each participant in case they were experiencing distress. Finally, the interviews were translated from Creole to English and

thematically analysed using the steps outlined below.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was achieved in several steps as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). Firstly, the transcripts were read several times, line by line to look for 'in vivo' categories which are named by words that the interviewees used themselves (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Because each transcript was being read several times, this stage has been referred to as an 'immersion in the texts'. Notes were taken to help familiarisation with the transcripts and using the notes, the researcher tried to look for underlying meaning of the experiences of the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The second stage involved drawing out hidden themes from the transcripts. By reading the transcripts again, themes were highlighted using color codes. The highlighted parts of the transcripts reflected key points or significant texts relating to the research. Notes explaining the highlighted ideas were also kept on post stickers as memos, alongside the highlighted texts to help the researcher add meaning and clarity to the texts.

The last stage included re- reading the transcripts to make sure that all the information was accounted for and to look for any contradictions that might exist (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The transcripts were re read to check whether the highlighted themes made sense and whether they could be identified where expected (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To further provide an audit trail which is a transparent account of the processes done in analysis (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005), notes on the researcher's interpretations and thoughts were recorded during the analysis process and these were checked against the final presentation of the data. When compiled, these notes made up the reflective journal. The purpose of these notes was to avoid researcher biases and over

interpretation.

To finally confirm the occurring themes, member checking was done (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This involved checking with two of the interviewees to see if they agreed with the themes. This process is a useful means of making sure that the analysis is of high quality (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The two interviewees who were invited for member checking had shown great interest in the study and provided in depth answers to the interview questions. They were shown the extracted themes and after verifying the themes, they agreed that these reflected their views on university transition.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of the data identified that findings support current literature, but there were also some unique themes that emerged. Overall, the interviewees highlighted that there were negative issues surrounding their university transition, but these were also balanced by some positive experiences both in their academic and personal lives and that these experiences have enhanced their personal growth.

Three themes were observed in relation to the students' experience, namely academic support, social support and financial support (see Table 1). The findings will show the interactive nature of these themes and as can be seen, it was impossible to categorise the issues into either academic or socio cultural, because of the complexity of transition. In this study, isolation was the most prominent issue and all the interviewees agreed that they had experienced isolation in one form or another, and so it was identified as the phenomenological 'essence' of their experience.

As will be seen from the findings, all the issues interact with each other to form a complex phenomenon. To achieve a full understanding of how international students

cope and what services we can develop to support their coping, we cannot take any particular dimensions of experience in disconnection from others (Guilfoyle, 2006). In all of the themes, language issues, socialising and the effect of the scholarship were prominent and interacting issues. As such, these issues cannot be separated, as together, they form the complexity of university transition and IS can experience any combination of these issues. Therefore, when reporting the findings, the components have been integrated to reflect the complexity of university transition.

Table 1

Themes and Issues that Contributed to a sense of Isolation

Theme	Issues
Academic Support	Missing Orientation
	Social interactions
	Informal Teaching style
	Seeking academic help
	The Scholarship
	Subtleties of Language
Social support	Social interactions
	Cultural differences
	Discrimination
	Homesickness
	Subtleties of Language
Financial support	The Scholarship

Social interactions

Employment and accommodation difficulties

Academic support

Previous literature has shown that IS experience a number of academic issues related to the different learning and teaching environment of universities (Kiley, 2003). These findings were supported in this study, as exacerbated by missing orientation and the pressures of the scholarship.

Missing Orientation

“I thought that the university would help us get settled in academically. We came late for orientation and I felt that we were thrown in, without being ready. I didn’t know how to look for books in the library or where the bookshop was.”

Research has shown that the orientation programs can help to lessen confusion and feelings of being lost, by preparing IS for university lives overseas (Rhoden & Boin, 2002). Orientation and other pre arrival services also help students get acquainted with the academic system and teach the students about the points of contact should help be needed (Suen, 1998). Because many of the interviewed IS missed orientation, they did not get these benefits and this led to a negative impact on their experience; showing the important need of orientation.

Social interactions

Orientation not only helps students academically, but socially as well, as it helps build social networks. In the current study, many students reported that they did not form part of any social club because they missed orientation and missed information on the availability of social clubs:

“University didn’t let me know which clubs were available”

It was argued that post-orientation programs would have helped them not only get acquainted with the academic setting, but also build social networks. It has to be noted that Seychelles students structurally come late due to the lengthy periods taken to get granted visas, and services should therefore cater for this phenomenon.

Other students argued that their limited socialisation was because they had a heavy academic work load and thus had no time. This issue ties in with social and financial support which will also be discussed.

Informal teaching style

Research has shown that almost all first year university students experience academic stress, characterised by confusion and stress related to the change in learning environment and methods (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005). Research has also identified that for some IS, the first year experience is intensified because they were used to passive learning and using rote memorising methods to learn materials and this made it difficult to adjust to the independent and informal nature of Australian universities.

However, Seychelles students had a different position. In the current study, there was general consensus that the style of teaching and learning was different, but the interviewees expressed that this was a positive experience and that the informality and independence made them better learners. It did take time to adjust, but the overall impression was that it was a positive change.

“I didn’t have any big problems adjusting to the different academic environment of university; I mean it took time to adjust to calling the lecturers by their first name. It’s less stressful. I’m an independent learner and in charge of your own learning”

Thus, although the responses did support previous literature about IS and adjusting

to the new independent learning style, Seychelles IS did not seem to experience that stress for a long time. It appeared that there was an initial stress associated with the different university etiquettes and the study load but that it was a temporary stress and most of the interviewees reported that they got used to the teaching style fairly quickly.

Seeking academic help

In terms of seeking academic help, overwhelmingly interviewees reported that they could not approach teaching staff and that they would rather ask other Seychellois peers for help or struggle with it themselves:

“I am not comfortable to raise my hand in class to ask a question or to go to their office... they [lecturers] say that we can come by anytime, but their body language says otherwise. I would actually rather go to my classmates, as there are a number of other Seychellois students in my class. They [lecturers] could also not want to talk to me; I might feel embarrassed to ask questions”

This finding might support research that has shown that many students from authoritarian cultures were used to regarding their teachers as people in authority and who are always right, so they became uncomfortable to ask for help (Pines et al., 2003). It also supports previous literature on IS preferring informal and personalised services as they may be uncomfortable accessing formal services provided by universities (Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2007). In the current study, many students reported that they felt uncomfortable accessing formal help and preferred a one to one basis service. Many students reported that although there were many academic services available, they were done in big groups and they felt services were under staffed:

“I was sent to the academic writing class... I felt more comfortable when I got a personal appointment, because it was only me and the teacher... it took time to get an appointment though, she was the only person running the program”

The students thus argued that an informal Seychelles student's association would be better for them as they could feel more comfortable speaking to someone they can trust and who speaks Creole.

Other general academic problems experienced by IS as identified by previous research include difficulty following academic rules and using resources (Adrian- Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007). Again, in the current study, this was temporary, as all the interviewees quickly learnt about the available resources and were taught correct procedures during referencing:

“With written presentations, again, in the beginning it was difficult to get used to, like referencing, but now I’ve got a hold of it”

The scholarship

Many IS expressed additional pressure to excel academically because of the scholarship arrangements. As pointed out, they had to honour their part of the agreement or the guarantors, who in most cases are the parents, will end up paying the government the cost of their studies. Therefore, many students were feeling the pressure to excel academically, so they had to accept the Australian lifestyle fairly quickly whether they liked it or not:

“I need to [stay at university], I am on a scholarship. I owe the government. I am a bit tired of the university life, but given that my parents will owe the government money if I fail or quit...I have to stay and pass all my units”

Thus, in relation to academic difficulties, it can be said that Seychelles IS, like many IS, experience initial stress related to the different university learning and teaching style, but after being exposed to university etiquette, most students reported less academic stress. On this note, it should be pointed out that the students reported that they

learnt how to use resources from other Seychelles IS and not from university staff because most missed the orientation program, and this reinforced their sense of isolation:

“My friends showed me how to access resources from the library, using student card ... if I had been to orientation, maybe I would have been shown. I’d rather my friends show me than ask for help”

As can be seen, learning how to use resources decreased the levels of academic stress experienced by the IS and orientation might have helped built social networks. Thus perhaps universities should consider offering a post- orientation program for any IS who missed the initial program, or a peer mentoring program that is culturally/ cohort specific.

Subtleties of Language

English proficiency has been identified as the most serious issues faced by IS (Birell, 2006), affecting both their academic performance and social interactions as well. Previous research has shown that a lack of English skills creates reluctance to participate in, and feeling uncomfortable with oral presentations and having difficulties with written work (Durkin, 2005). These findings were also supported in the interviews, where the students found oral presentations daunting to the point of extreme anxiety and worry, because of perceived language issues:

“I hate presentations; I worry that they might not understand anything I say, so I do badly in the end”

Further support should be given by first identifying struggling students with confidence in oral presentations, then providing these students with strategies on how to overcome their anxiety and how to present in front of an audience.

Social support

The first few questions in the interview focused on the student's expectations of university and if their experiences met their expectations, but experiences fell short of their expectations. Many argued that because the only exposure to how university might look like were American movies, which portrayed universities as fun places with 'sororities' and 'parties', they experienced shock and disappointment when they arrived at university and their experience did not match their expectations:

"I thought it would be like in the movies, people would come to university in flashy clothes, flashy cars and with blondes everywhere... But the atmosphere is different; it's like a ghost town. It's not as lively as I expected it would be."

Social interactions

As has been discussed above, the problems experienced by IS are complicated and they interact with and affect each other in a number of ways. Language barriers, financial problems and academic issues determine whether or not IS socialise with host peers. Moreover, limited social interaction with host nationals can lead to isolation, depression and loneliness (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005). In the current study, students reported that socialising becomes very difficult because the IS only met host nationals at university and this structure made it difficult to maintain friendships:

"It's not easy to form close friendships with some people as they would only talk to you in class and will not socialize outside university. It's also hard to make friends with people who can't understand what you're saying"

Other interviewees found it difficult to socialise and make friends because of time restrictions. They argued that between their assignments and their job, there was no time for anything else. This was especially true for couples with children, who reported that they only came to university to study and did not have the time to socialise as they have

to juggle their academic, marital and work life. This finding is supported by research, where it has been reported that married IS find it harder to socialise, which then led to more isolation and poor transition (McClure, 2003).

To help lessen social isolation, universities have provided formal services to encourage social interactions such as peer mentoring and organizing social events for international students (Best, Hajzler, & Henderson, 2007). ECU has a peer mentoring program, that one of the interviewees praised highly and reported that “just knowing that someone’s there” helped academically and socially as well. It has to be noted that only the psychology department has a widely known peer mentoring program, the other interviewees reported that they did not know if their school had such a program and that they felt uncomfortable to ask staff:

“I was watching the TV last week and saw the ad for peer mentoring for psychology students, we don’t have that in our faculty and I didn’t want to ask staff if we had any either... it would have helped us too”.

Cultural differences

There are a number of issues that relate to isolation, including culture shock, language problems, discrimination and homesickness (Searl & Ward, 1990). In the current study, isolation was the most prominent theme, and many of the students reported feeling isolated in one or more ways:

“The food, the lifestyle, the clothes are all different (compared to Seychelles), I suddenly felt that I was different, I looked different and I felt that I stood out and wasn’t integrated in this culture”

Previous research has shown that IS from cultures that differ a lot to the culture in which they decide to study, are affected by culture shock the most (Ward, Bochner, &

Furnham, 2001). Because Seychelles has a collectivist culture, different to the individualist Australian culture, many students reported culture shock.

Culture shock can have a number of negative effects on the students' mental and physical health (Andrade, 2006), affecting their academic as well as social lives (Han, Jamieson, & Young, 2000). Many of the other students reported that the Australian culture was completely different to the Seychelles culture, and that this led to loneliness and sadness in some students:

"Culturally, they are closed and private. People keep to themselves, whereas in Seychelles, we are opened and everyone knows everyone. I have been living in the same house for one year and I don't know my neighbor's name. Australians are friendly as long as they don't have to go out their way. If you talk to them, they are friendly, but they won't make the effort to talk to you and make you feel welcomed. There are people that I have met that are genuinely friendly, but there are those that are not."

Also, because most of the students came from conservative and religious families, they found it hard to accept the Australian lifestyle where homosexuality is accepted and violent crimes are rife. Many argued that if they had been given pre- arrival information about Australia, they would have been more prepared and they would not have had such a shock:

"I didn't expect that the Australian culture would be so different to our own. I thought there would be a greater sense of community and friendliness. My feelings were crushed when I understood that you were meant to speak quietly on buses and that the churches were empty and crime was rife. I think they [universities] could have warned us beforehand, prepared us in some way... given us these information before I found out the hard way"

Discrimination

Another reason why students did not socialize and were having difficulty adjusting to the Australian life was because of perceived discrimination. Many students

reported some form of racial discrimination both at university and in the community and this has brought a number of negative effects including further isolation, reduction in socializing and discrimination has also contributed towards academic problems:

“ I used to love the color of my skin, whenever I was asked what I liked most about me, I would say my skin, but since coming here [to Australia] it's changed. People curse at me, insulted me, spit at me and I've had instances where they would not sit next to me [in buses and trains]. I hate being a black person in a white country. It's different, coming here has taught me what it's like to be in the minority group...I don't know how most people would react to this, but I was offended. A guy called me nigger and swore at me just because I didn't understand what he said to me”

Many studies have shown that IS face racial and/or ethnic discrimination when studying abroad, and this can lead to a number of negative effects, including lowered self- esteem (Romero & Roberts, 2003), high stress levels (Pak, Dion & Dion, 1991), higher levels of anxiety and depression (Phinney, Madden & Santos, 1998), chronic mental health problems (Leong & Ward, 2000) and higher levels of in- group identification (Pak, Dion & Dion, 1991). The high in- group identification and higher patriotism was particularly significant for many students, reporting that the discrimination made them appreciate their country more and encouraged more associations with other Seychellois rather than with host nationals:

“Because of what I've been through, I love my country even more...I can't wait to go back home again. It's a difficult life, but it's my life, my home”

Some students reported that being discriminated against was shocking because they had the expectation that Australia was multi- cultural and so would be more tolerant to other cultures. Furthermore, what was more shocking was the fact that university staff was discriminating against them and that made it harder for the students to accept:

“I’ve experienced racial discrimination at university, the last place I thought it would happen. I had a tutor for one of my units who would not answer questions asked by black students. There were a few of us in that class and she was really cheerful and helpful with everyone else, she assumed that we didn’t need help I guess. All of us (Seychelles students) did badly in that unit because she didn’t want to acknowledge or help us out”

When talking about discrimination, most of the interviewees looked hurt and sad.

It was an emotional topic, but they wanted to talk about it and it was as if they wanted others to know that racism is still rife amongst us all. The students expressed their frustration at the fact that Australia claims to be multi- cultural and yet discrimination still exists. They linked these feelings to a general sense of homesickness.

Homesickness

Lack of social interactions results in a number of negative effects, including homesickness, feeling lonely, sad and depressed (Sawir et al., 2008). In the current study, many students reported loneliness as not the factor per se, but feeling homesick, mainly because of a lack of social support from the university and being far from familiarity. This then became a vicious cycle as the homesickness made them retreat and socialise less:

“[I miss] my family and sometimes I miss Seychellois as a whole. I spend most of my time calling back home or my Seychelles friends here and I don’t socialize that much...I miss home”

These findings support previous literature which points out that discrimination added to homesickness can lead to disengagement in academic life and a reduction in social interactions. This then limits learning and cultural exchange that IS brings and/or seeks (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

When asked how universities could help with this situation, many argued that

education and admitting that there is a problem is the only way to reduce discriminatory acts experienced by IS. As universities claim to respect all individuals and value integrity and personal excellence (on each student card), this made it even harder for the interviewees to comprehend why IS experience discrimination and had a belief that maybe it was something about them per se:

“At a well respected higher education institution... they [university staff] know the effects of racism and the history...I could not believe it when lecturers and tutors were racist.”

They further argued that in order to uphold these values, universities need to address the issue of discriminations amongst their staff. In regards to experiencing discriminations outside university, students argued that they could have been warned about potential racism with the local community, because they did not expect that racism would still exist in a multi- cultural culture. Adding the negative experiences they were having at university and those in the community led to a cumulative effect, making their university transition more difficult, and again, reinforcing their feelings of isolation.

Subtleties of Language:

As suggested, improving English proficiency has been identified as one of the major reasons why students decide to study abroad (Birell, 2006). However, ironically, it has also been identified as one of the prevalent issues that hinder academic growth and/or social interaction between host and international students (Borland & Pearce, 1999). In the current study, English proficiency became a problem for younger students and those students who were not studying to become teachers:

“Speaking in English is not a problem for me, I don’t know if it’s because of my background, being an English teacher, but, yeah, it’s not an issue. I mean, we had to teach in English back home, I mean you know that all lessons are delivered in

English, unless you're learning French, so I was prepared. I don't think Seychellois has issues with speaking or understanding English, but I think that it takes time to get the Aussie accent"

The interviewees expressed that it was not an issue to speak in English, but because the Australian accent was different to the British version which they had been taught, they experienced academic difficulties and it also became difficult for them to interact socially:

"It's not speaking in English that's the problem, it's speaking Australian English. We learnt the British version and it's difficult to adjust to the accent and the slang here. Everything is shortened and it makes me feel like I don't really know English"

Interestingly, some English teachers expressed that because they rarely spoke in English and because of the slang in the Australian language, their "English has taken a step back". Others argued that their English language has suffered because they "tend to speak as little English as possible" and that they only spoke in English if they were at university because they were living with other Seychelles students. Even at university, they would only speak out of necessity and this not only decreased their confidence in their English speaking abilities, but also decreased their confidence to socialize. Some students went as far as stating that they limit the situations in which they would have to speak in English because they lacked confidence in their English speaking skills and because of this, their English skills have diminished.

On the other hand, the younger students pointed out that they had actual problems with speaking in English on a daily basis and that they often found themselves in situations where they would either swap an English word for a Creole word, or they would stop speaking to think of the proper English term to use. It has to be noted that

these students have reported that once they got familiar with the idea of speaking in English daily and used to the Australian accent, they became more confident:

“Yes, like I see myself swapping English words for Creole words all the time. In class, I would be talking to classmates and hear myself say a Creole word. I think I have to work on that, it’s not a major issue, but an issue nevertheless.”

Thus, language barriers were not as big a problem for Seychelles IS as for other IS who had not learnt English. As pointed out before, all Seychelles students learn English and French in schools. Speaking English on a daily basis was a problem only for non-teaching students, as teaching students had been exposed to teaching in English and so had confidence in their English skills. It is important therefore to know the detailed background of students and how this affects their transition.

Regardless of profession, all students reported that speaking in English was not a big issue, but it was the Australian accent that was hard to understand and that it took them some time to get used to. In response to these findings, universities could provide more support for students to get exposed to the Australian language, culture and people.

In regards to coping with this difficulty, students reported that they used technology to keep in contact with their family and friends from Seychelles as their form of social support. Through emails and phone calls, students kept in touch with their family to help them cope with the stresses of university life:

“My friends have helped, as have my family. I call them fortnightly and it’s good to hear their voices. Also, my father visits me often, so I have that to look forward to...I talked to them about being homesick.”

Financial support

Research has shown that both accommodation and financial issues also affect

university transition, by preoccupying the student's academic and social lives, leaving less room for social interactions or for studying (Dorough, 2006).

The scholarship

These findings were supported in the current study. All of the interviewees argued that although they receive the monthly allowance as per their scholarship agreement, they still struggled financially and had to find employment because the allowance sometimes came in late and they had rent and other bills due:

"I thought that I could live comfortably on the stipend I get from the government, but I have to find a job because my rent is expensive and so is grocery. Between my job and uni [university], I have no time for any parties or to join social clubs"

This supports literature, namely the study carried out by Forbes- Mewett et al. (2007) where it was found that financial worries interacted with academic worries and possible language barrier to create a difficult and negative university transition. Also, the scholarship not only created financial worries, but as mentioned affected with the students' academic lives by creating more pressure and their social lives as well.

Social interactions

The above quote clearly demonstrates how financial worries can hinder social interactions. The students argued that their financial worries, coupled with a lack of time, made it difficult to socialize. This was a big issue for many students because as mentioned, their expectations of university were centred on parties and fun and their financial worries and lack of time stopped them from socializing and having fun:

"I don't have the time; I mean between the assignments and readings that need to be done, I have no time to spare ...it is also costly to go out"

Financial worries crippled socialising in other ways as well, because the students

reported feeling uncomfortable to attend social events organized by universities because these events were either being held at an inconvenient location and/ or time or incurred a fee which the students could not afford:

“There are no free activities, and as students I would think it’s well versed that we are broke. It would be nice if the university could take us somewhere without paying anything. Also, universities organized events that were either far, and since we don’t have transport and can’t really travel at night, we couldn’t attend or it involved a rather uncomfortable fee”.

Employment and accommodation issues

One of the prominent issues identified by previous research in relation to finance was problems finding accommodation and employment (Forbes- Mewett et al., 2007). All but one of the interviewees agreed that it was difficult to find housing and employment. Participant 11 was staying with family who already resides in Australia, and so had no issues finding housing or employment.

“Housing was difficult; it depends on the criteria they use to select people. I mean again, the bureaucracy is incredible. There are lots of paper work, and asking about references. I’m a new student here, no one knows me, and how am I going to get references”

When asked what the university could do to help with these situations, students argued that because they were new here and had no experience, the university could help them get references and advise them if there are classes being offered on how to address selection criterion placed by employers. They also reported that university should provide more flexible and fully staffed housing services.

From the above reports, it is clear that Seychelles IS, like all other IS reported in the above literature, experience financial difficulties and problems in finding accommodation and jobs (Forbes- Mewett et al., 2007). They had to depend on other

Seychelles students who were already studying to show them around and help them find accommodation and employment. It should also be noted that some of the interviewees had their spouses and dependent children with them as well and this contributed to more financial strains on all parties involved.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, the Seychelles cohort is unique in a number of ways when compared to previous literature on IS and the findings add to the literature on transition in those respects. Language barriers which has been the most prominent issue surrounding cross-cultural learning has not been identified as the most important issue for the Seychelles cohort. As was discussed, it was not their English language per se that was the issue, it was getting used to the Australian way of speaking. Also, literature has shown that support from the host national is necessary for adjustment and yet this was not identified by the Seychelles cohort. Instead, many of the interviewees mentioned that support from their fellow Seychellois were more important than befriending Australians. On the other hand, many of the findings have supported literature on IS. The Seychelles cohort has experienced homesickness, discrimination, loneliness, financial difficulties, academic issues and problems socialising. All these issues interacted with each other, leaving a sense of isolation for many of the students.

Important outcomes of these findings suggest that although many studies have grouped IS together, there are unique differences between each cohort. This can lead to incomplete findings as each student has their own personal experiences and come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Novera, 2004). The implications of this study were twofold.

Seychelles IS are similar to other IS in one way, but unique in other ways. Because of this, services need to reflect these similarities and differences. As Seychelles students are a fairly recent intake of students, many of the available services might not be tailored for them and this made them an interesting cohort to study in terms of how services should be applied to a specific cultural group. Although the study did not focus specifically on service provision, the participants did comment on their experiences with some of the services provided by the university. For example, many of the students reported personalized and informal services; the recommendation is therefore, for universities to provide better catered and staffed services for particular IS cohort. These services should surround the various academic, social and financial supports as discussed in the paper.

The interviewees called for a Seychelles student association as previously, ECU had an informal association for Seychelles students, but this was not seen through as it disintegrated after a couple of years. The second recommendation was for better entente between the university and the Seychelles government. This can lessen issues surrounding finding accommodation and possibly lead to developing post orientation programs for late comers and highlights the critical need for orientation programs.

Although universities have provided a number of services for IS, numerous studies continue to show that IS are not being adequately catered for. A balance should be sought between what IS need and what is economically feasible for universities, so that both parties benefit (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

The study was not without limitations. Firstly, the study only interviewed Seychelles IS and so the data cannot be generalized to other IS cohorts. It has to be noted

that the study was qualitative in nature and the aim was to report in detail the experiences of the Seychelles students, and not to generalize the data. Secondly, as only student participants were interviewed, there is a need to connect their views with others and understand the point of view of service providers, teaching staff and the student's peers. Thirdly, the study does not allow for an understanding of how university transition issues change over time, and so there is a need for more longitudinal studies. Together, these will provide a more complete view of university transition.

Therefore, in conclusion, it can be said that the study achieved its aim, in that it allowed for an understanding of the experiences of Seychelles students during university transition. Using the findings above, universities can develop better catered services for Seychelles students and improve the existing ones, by making the services personalized, informal and better staffed. By doing so, this can lessen the isolated feelings students experienced. Direction for future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of available services being offered to IS such as the academic writing classes and peer mentoring program mentioned by the students, to understand if the IS are benefitting from the services and what should be done to improve them. As said before, future research is needed to understand the point of view of all parties involved and also understand how the university transition experience changes over time.

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Appendix A

Interview schedule

1. What were your expectations of support before coming to university?
2. What were your experiences of support when you arrived in Australia? Did they meet your expectations? Prompt to discuss any experiences about cultural, social, academic support.
3. Did you encounter positive or negative experiences, based on cultural differences if any?
4. Did you encounter positive or negative experiences, based on social differences if any?
5. Did you encounter positive or negative experiences, based on academic differences if any?
6. Were there any academic difficulties or issues you came across once you started your studies? Prompt about academic difficulties, issues with oral and written presentations, adjustment issues and home sickness and how teaching styles affected their progress.
7. What were your experiences socializing with local students and/or students from your or other cultures? Do you form part of any club or extracurricular activity on campus?
8. Overall, how do you think your transition into university went?
9. What services do you think helped you settle?
10. Could any other services have helped this?
11. How are you coping now, what were the key factors in your coping strategies that

you would share with prospective students to help them when they come to university?

Thank you for participating!

Appendix B

Subject: to all Seychelles students

Message: hello, I am a Seychelles student studying psychology at Edith Cowan University and I am in my fourth year. I am doing a research project on Seychelles students' experiences during transition to university. I have attached an information letter about the research and a consent letter as well. I am looking for any Seychelles students who might be willing to participate. Please email me back within two weeks of receiving this email if you are interested.

Your help is greatly appreciated (Sophia Harryba)

Appendix C

Information Letter

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking the time to read about my study. I am Sophia Harryba and I am a Seychelles student who is completing this study as a requirement for my Honours degree in Psychology at the Edith Cowan University.

The aim of this study is to understand the experiences that Seychelles international students go through during transition into university, and the support systems they think they need. The study also aims to explore the coping mechanisms used by international students to adjust to university life. This research will hopefully help professionals, namely university staff and also other potential students understand the needs of international students, and thus aid in the development of better tailored services to help them.

Your input is valuable and may possibly influence decision making processes on future services offered to international students.

If you agree to participate, you will take part in one interview session with the researcher which will be carried out in Creole, discussing your experience as an international student. A suitable venue and meeting times for the interviews will be negotiated with you. The interview will last between 30- 60 minutes.

If you agree to participate, data from the study will be tape recorded so that no information is lost, and it will also aid in analysis at the end of the study. However, the study will be guided by the ethical guidelines. Participation in this project is voluntary, you will provide informed consent, and your information will be confidential.

To ensure confidentiality, any information about you and other participants that could be used as identification, will be changed. Therefore, no real names will be used. Also, only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data, which will be kept in a locked cabinet in the supervisor's office and then destroyed by removing the tapes and destroying those using chemicals.

If you agree to the above, please complete and sign the attached consent form that will allow the researcher and the supervisor to use tape recordings under the above conditions.

I also understand that what will be discussed might be stressful to you; therefore, contact details of free counseling services have been included at the end of this document.

Therefore:

1. The data will remain confidential
2. You can withdraw without prejudice at any time
3. You are participating voluntarily
4. Please feel free to ask any questions!

For any further information, do not hesitate to contact the researcher or the supervisor.

Thank you for your participation,

Researcher: Sophia Harryba

Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Guilfoyle

Tel: 0432028187.

Tel: 63045543

Independent contact: Carole Gamsby Tel: 63045626

Mount Lawley counseling service building 3.128

Tel: 93706706 email: counseling@ecu.edu.au opening hours: 8.30 am-4.30pm mon-fri

Appendix D

Participant consent form

I _____ have read and understood the information sheet that was provided by the researcher, Sophia Harryba. I have understood the aim of the research and have given my consent for participating in this study. I have understood that no personal information will be revealed and transcripts of the data will be used to analyze the final results of the study, which will not include any identifying information. I know of my rights as a participant to withdraw out of the research at any time I wish and I also know that I will not be pressured for participation or to stay in the study if I do not want to. I give authorization for the interview to be tape recorded. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and any questions I had, have been answered to my satisfaction.

Signed participant:

Signed researcher:

Date:

Date:

Contact number:

Appendix E

Reflective journal

All the interviews went smoothly at first, but I was surprised at a few things that the participants said. During data collection, I did not expect some of the problems that the participants were going through. Some of the students have gone through very hard times. From my personal experience, most students who come to study in Australia do not want to go back home, but what was surprising was that all the participants couldn't wait to finish their studies and go home. Cross-cultural learning made them appreciate their home country more. One of the participants said that "I am only adjusting to the Australian culture to survive staying here; I will not take on any more than I have to". This was the feeling of the majority of the participants: hold on to get through.

Another participant said "why bother making Australian friends when I have Seychelles friends?" I thought that was very harsh. Further, many participants reported discriminatory acts towards them, and few participants reported that this made them dislike Australians. I remember thinking that this is a vicious circle; someone has to make the first step to stop it; finding that someone is the hard part. Like was said in the interviews, university could start by offering information to prospective students, letting them know that racism still exists and provide some tools to help students deal with it. Also, educating staff would help by eliminating the chances that they might discriminate against IS.

Another surprising thing was the closeness that Seychellois students share. Apart from becoming more patriotic, all of the Seychelles students reported that if it wasn't for the help of other Seychelles students, they would be lost. Many of these students did not

know each other back home, but when it came to helping another here, they all stepped in and helped. This created a safe place for many of the students. It is worth noting though, that some participants reported that because of the help that they received (be it in finding accommodation, jobs, getting around); they felt that they owed these students.

There were a few topics that made a few of the participants uncomfortable. This led to unanswered questions and/or unfinished answers. Although I told them that they had the right to withdraw at any time, and that participation was voluntary, two of the participants reported feeling uncomfortable during debriefing. They attributed this to the fact that they were talking about negative aspects of their transition, including discrimination, feeling homesick and lonely. Although they reported that because they were being interviewed by a familiar person, in their mother- tongue, which made it easier to express themselves fully and they did not having to worry about their accent, they still were uncomfortable because the issues reminded them of horrible incidences.

Overall, I felt that the participants made their views known and were expecting some form of change for prospective students. Change was reported in the sense of better catered services and entente between the university and international students. Many participants reported feeling ripped off, as they are paying the full tuition fees. One participant said that “I don’t think we are getting our monies worth. I mean what are we really paying for? We don’t get help when we need it; they leave us to fend for ourselves when we don’t know where to start”. This view was shared amongst most of the participants.

During data analysis, I did not expect that translating from Creole to English would be difficult. I found it hard to find the exact words but since most of the

participants answered in English anyway, this was not a big problem. Also, I found it hard to include some of the explicit terms used by the students such as “unfriendly” or “racist” when referring to host nationals. I thought that it will offend people, but because the study aimed to unpack all the issues regarding university transition, I had to put my embarrassment aside.

Even when I re- read the transcripts and when I had finished the analysis and was going through the paper, I felt that I was blaming the university too much. I thought that they were doing what they could and that my paper will only add to what they know. How much more can they do? But then I realized that again, the study aimed to unpack and understand university transition holistically and not just partially and so I had to include everything. Like many of the students, I was still concerned with the idea of paying fees which do not equate to the services offered.

Personally, the interviews generated great emotions for me. I will be disappointed if the student’s views and opinions are ignored. Hopefully, this research will serve as grounds to develop more services for international students. As one participant said “why not ask us what we want, why not use international students to provide services for other international students? No one knows us better than ourselves”

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